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DEPT FOR EUR/RUS M PILZ HARBIN

DRL S CORKE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PHUM RS SOCI

SUBJECT: SOKOLOV HEARING POSTPONED

REF: A. YEKAT 30            B. YEKAT 55

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¶1. (SBU) On October 28, Vice Consul and Pol/Econ assistant attended a procedural hearing at Sverdlovsk regional court for imprisoned human rights activist Aleksey Sokolov. A former prisoner turned activist, Sokolov was arrested on May 13 in the run-up to the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which took place in June. The ostensible reason for Sokolov's arrest was new information, all coming from prison informants, implicating Sokolov in a series of old crimes. (see reftels) The October 28 hearing could have either resulted in formal charges, an extension of the investigation period, or Sokolov's release. The judge canceled the hearing at the last minute and rescheduled it for November 18th. In the meantime, Sokolov's lawyer told us on October 30 that the prosecutor had found the case against Sokolov sufficient to warrant a criminal trial. The lawyer expects that the trial will take place in the next few weeks.

¶2. (SBU) Sokolov's previous hearings had been closed to the public and we were surprised to find that no media of any kind appeared at the court to cover this first public hearing. We were joined at the courthouse by a Consul from the German Consulate, Sokolov's wife, his attorney, and another prisoner rights activist who spent time in Soviet gulag system. The presence of international observers was unusual enough to illicit a snide response from court bailiff who spoke dismissively to Sokolov's attorney about our presence.

¶3. (SBU) According to the judge, the hearing was canceled due to the late notification regarding Sokolov's desire to participate in the hearing via video conference. Sokolov's attorney ridiculed the justification and said that he had filed the request on time. He said that Sokolov has participated in all of his court hearings and alleged that authorities were making it impossible for Sokolov to file the necessary documents from prison.

¶4. (SBU) Sokolov's wife was very appreciative of the Consulate's presence. She said she felt that international attention on her husband's case was helping to insure his safety in prison. She asked that the Consulate again send a representative to the next hearing.

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